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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused February 6-8 news coverage on the tumbling world stock markets last Friday; on the prosecutors' search of a local financial holding company last Friday; and on the year-end five city and county magistrates' elections. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial and an op-ed piece in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" both discussed U.S. arms sales to Taiwan. The editorial said the Taiwan people should no longer put hopes in the Ma administration, which just curries favor with China and sees Taiwan's defense needs as child's play. The op-ed also said Taiwan's defense needs have been ignored during the United States' decision-making process. An editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News," however, said Taiwan can use its "soft power" to play a critical role in the triangular relationship between Washington, Beijing and Taipei. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" discussed China's rising confidence and "increasing assertiveness" in its dealings with China. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said Taiwan's "best path is to play the role of a democratic balancer to the rise of an authoritarian and expansionist China and the declining regional presence of the U.S. ..." End summary.

A) "Can [We] Allow the Ma Administration to Cling Obstinate to Its Reckless Course?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] editorialized (2/6):

"... As the receiver of the United States' arms sales to Taiwan, a decision made in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, our government did make some positive responses [to the move]. But in response to China's picking an argument for no reason, the Ma administration, which is adopting an all-round China-tilting policy line, did not dare to make any comment. China has been deploying heavy military forces and many missiles on the opposite side of the Taiwan Strait, and it has openly declared that it will not hesitate to use force to annex the island. Judging from basic common sense, Taiwan's procurements of foreign armaments are nothing but a move aimed at maintaining its fundamental defense needs. ...

"... But now Ma Ying-jeou has cut corners for the United States [in terms of the arms sales to Taiwan], as shown in the arms sales package which does not contain the submarines and more advanced fighter jets). Still, [the Ma administration's] reactions were simply to justify its expedited tilting toward China -- namely, 'arms sales' would [enable Taiwan] to engage in more interactions with Beijing. [The KMT], be it a ruling or opposition party, has been wholeheartedly trying to curry favor with China and has viewed Taiwan's fundamental defense needs as insignificant matters. How can the Taiwan people have hope in such a political party? ..."

B) "[U.S.] Arms Sales to Taiwan, a Minor Defect in Something Otherwise Perfect"

Bill Chang, an advisory member at the Taiwan Thinktank, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 680,000] (2/6):

"... The acquisition of large-scale military weapons requires a long time and complicated preparations beforehand. Now that the United States has failed Taiwan again in [providing it with] certain major [arms] items, it is obvious that [Washington] has failed to catch up with Taiwan's needs for its military buildup. This is particularly true given that Taiwan is incapable of manufacturing such weapons and has no other reliable channels to acquire those weapons. Furthermore, it is already a fact that Washington has attached increasing importance to China. Since [President Barack] Obama took over the helm, [U.S.] arms sales to Taiwan have appeared to become a ritual-like political gesture -- Namely, [it is announced] once a year and tries to avoid all the 'sensitive items' while focusing on telling [the world] that there is no significant changes in Washington's China policy and showing the Congress that it adheres to the 'Taiwan Relations Act' without provoking China. As a result, the consequence is that the priority for Taiwan's real defense needs have unexpectedly dropped in the United States' decision-making process. ... Should Beijing gradually take over control of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, resulting in Taiwan spending big money but unable to get the weapons it needs most, it will create a lot of hidden problems for Taiwan's security. "

C) "Taiwan's Sense of Security: 'Soft Power' Is More Important"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (2/6):

"... Judging from [all these perspectives], the arms sales issue indeed has many layers of peculiarity: First, it would be more appropriate to say that Taiwan has been holding money in both its hands to purchase protection from the United States rather than buying weapons from the United States. Second, in the end, it is

still up to the United States' own interests whether Washington is willing to protect Taiwan. Third, even if Taiwan has purchased weapons, its armaments are, after all, not sufficient for the island to defend itself should a war break out [in the Taiwan Strait]. In this vein, is Taiwan really the side 'that has no control over its actions' in the triangular framework between Washington, Beijing and Taipei?

"Not necessarily so. Since Taiwan has no ability to really 'end a war with wars,' it has to prevent wars using other means, or to take precautions before a war really happens. There is nothing else but 'soft power' that Taiwan can use to defend itself and to contribute to regional stability. ... China's rise is already a foregone conclusion, and those big countries, such as the United States and Japan, have long since started to modify their strategic interests. Someone says that only when Taiwan-U.S. relations are stabilized can cross-Straits relations be stabilized. But in fact, given the triangular relations between Washington, Beijing and Taipei, only when any of the bilateral relations becomes stabilized can the triangular relationship become stabilized. In light of this, Taiwan still has a critical role to play in between. ..."

D) "Beijing's Surprising 'Surplus of Confidence' in the World"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/8):

"... Now, Beijing speaks with increasing assertiveness, and acts with growing confidence. It didn't hesitate to lecture the U.S. and blame it for causing the global economic recession. It rejected U.S. demand for the revaluation of Renminbi, the Chinese currency which Washington says has been kept below its true value to make Chinese goods competitive in export. It brushed off criticism on human rights abuses. It sentenced dissident Liu Xiaobo to 11 years in jail despite Obama's pleading. It executed a Briton for drug trafficking despite Prime Minister Gordon Brown's request for clemency: The list goes on and on.

"Recently, there have been ominous signs that Beijing's diplomatic assertiveness is increasingly viewed by the rest of the world as unsettling and hubristic. As a result, the United States appears ready to hit back. A rough patch in Sino-U.S. relations is looming large. Last week, Beijing warned the United States in harsh language against President Obama's announcement of selling US\$6.4

billion arms to Taiwan, demanding that Obama rescind the 'mistaken decision' in order to avoid damaging broader U.S.-China relations. China is also adamantly opposed to Obama's planned meeting with the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet whom Beijing labeled a 'splittist,' in the White House, saying the rendezvous harms China's core interest. It should be noted that the U.S. is not doing anything different from what it has been doing all along. But Beijing's reaction is different -- unusually strong and vehement, and menacing. It bodes ill for relations between the world's superpower and a rising power. ..."

E) "Taiwan's Balancing Role in U.S.-PRC Relations"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (2/8):

"The relationship between the United States under new President Barack Obama and the Chinese Communist Party - ruled People's Republic of China entered a new reality - based stage following Washington's announcement Jan. 29 of a US\$6.4 billion package of defensive arms sales to Taiwan and Beijing's threatened retaliation. ... In the wake of Obama's visit, the Beijing leadership apparently believed that Washington's desire to seek PRC cooperation on a wide range of international issues signalled that the PRC could do anything it wanted and thus felt "cheated" when the Taiwan arms sales package was announced as if Washington had broke a promise not to sell weapons to Taiwan. Moreover, Beijing authorities may also have overlooked that their own harsh rhetoric over Obama's plans to announce the Taiwan arms package and meet with the Dalai Lama, the flap over Google's protests over PRC internet censorship, the lack of active cooperation with U.S. initiatives in the Copenhagen conference and its boycott against a U.S.-led push for new sanctions on Iran had combined to provoke Washington's decision to play 'hard ball.' ...

"In fact, the new US\$6.4 billion package of arms sale to Taiwan was mainly symbolic of Washington's intention to continue to abide by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and the exclusion of advanced F-16 Block C/D fighters and submarines signalled Obama's intention to avoid excessively angering Beijing or impeding the so-called cross-strait "reconciliation" launched by President Ma Ying-jeou's right-wing Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration. The changes in the atmosphere of U.S.-PRC relations should give a much needed wake-up call to the Ma's administration. First, it is evident that the PRC leadership is becoming more self-aggrandizing

instead of more responsible as its military, economic and diplomatic clout rises. ... Second, the Obama administration has finally gotten the message that the world democratic community should not entertain wishful thinking when dealing with Beijing and has wisely adopted a firmer stance toward the PRC as a pragmatic 'risk hedging' measure. What is more worrisome is the blindness of the Ma administration to these changes in Sino-American relations. ...

"Most importantly, while the Obama administration is formulating a more cautious China strategy, Ma and the KMT are pursuing a fantasy of reaching 'a cross-strait economic cooperation agreement' without regard or even awareness of the price tag in Taiwan's international status and economic autonomy. Ma should instead display his resolve to bolster Taiwan's self-defense capabilities by urging Washington to accelerate the review of selling more advanced fighters and submarines to Taiwan. Moreover, Ma should first refrain from further sending wrong messages to Washington, as he did last summer by saying that 'natural disaster, not mainland China, is Taiwan's main enemy.' ... Instead of 'leaning to one side' in the PRC's direction, Taiwan's best path is to play the role of a democratic balancer to the rise of an authoritarian and expansionist China and the declining regional presence of the U.S. and work more closely with both Washington and Tokyo to ensure our active participation in economic and trade mechanisms."

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